



House Select Committee on Homeland Security **Democrats**

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member, House Select Committee on Homeland Security made the following statement at a hearing of the Subcommittee on Infrastructure and Border Security on “The FY 2005 Request for the Border and Transportation Security Directorate.”

Secretary Hutchinson, welcome. It is good to see you again. I look forward this morning to your testimony on the budget request for the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security.

We meet here today less than one week after a devastating series of explosions killed 200 and injured over 1,500 rail passengers in Madrid. Our thoughts are with the victims, their families, and the Spanish people.

It now appears as if this terrorist attack was executed by Islamic extremists possibly linked to al Qaeda. This brutal attack serves as a tragic reminder that we are at war, that our enemies still have the capability to inflict substantial harm, and that we must redouble our efforts to both go after the terrorists and secure the homeland.

One would not have thought any such reminders were necessary. But I am struck by the fact that at this very moment the House Budget Committee is considering a proposal by Chairman Nussle to reduce the President’s homeland security budget by some \$857 million over the next five years. My Democratic colleagues and I wrote yesterday to the Chairman urging a reversal of these cuts and calling for increased security investments in areas where the country still faces dangerous security gaps.

Many of those recommendations fall within your area of responsibility Secretary Hutchinson, which is not surprising as your Directorate covers about half of the Department of Homeland Security’s budget and more than 60 percent of its employees.

While progress has been made over the last year in border and transportation security, I believe that more work needs to be done. I have several specific concerns that I would like you to address this morning.

Rail Security

In light of the attacks in Madrid, I would first like you to focus on the Department’s efforts to make our rail systems more secure.

As you know, we have 140,000 miles of train routes in the U.S., 500 Amtrak stations, and 500 major urban transit operators. Some 10 million train and subway trips are taken every day in the United States.

However, while the Transportation Security Administration requests \$5.3 billion for next fiscal year, only \$147 million – or less than three percent of the total TSA budget – is dedicated to modes of transportation other than airplanes. This striking disparity suggests to me that, at least at the TSA, rail, trucking, buses, ferries and all other forms of transportation are being marginalized.

I recognize that the Department has a \$50 million grant program outside of TSA for rail and transit security. But estimates of what is truly needed across the country total \$2 billion or more. This includes funding for the very items – such as sensors, communications equipment, and security cameras – which I understand you feel constitutes the “right approach” to rail and transit security. This area has not been a core concern of the Department and that must change.

You mentioned during an interview this week that perhaps we need to make greater investments in rail and transit security. I would like to hear your thoughts on what additional efforts the Department believes are necessary -- beyond what is included in the President’s budget -- to do a better job securing the transit systems upon which millions of Americans ride every day.

Other Transportation Security

Beyond rail security, I am also concerned about other transportation issues. While the Transportation Security Administration’s budget for next year is an \$892 million increase over the current level, additional funding is almost entirely for airport screening operations.

Funding is flat for air cargo screening and technology development, and there appears to be no new initiatives in this critical area. Air cargo only undergoes random searches, which are often conducted by shippers, whose security practices are not regularly verified by the Department. How long will it take until this Department starts taking seriously the threat presented by unscreened air cargo on passenger planes?

Radiation Portal Technology

Mr. Secretary, I am also concerned about the Department’s current pace in installing radiation portal monitors at our nation’s major border crossings. Such portals can be used to detect the presence of radiological materials that could comprise a weapon of mass destruction. The Bureau of Customs and Border Protection has a plan to deploy monitors at land borders, seaports, rail crossings, and other areas, by the end of next fiscal year, but the Administration’s FY 2005 budget is inadequate to complete the task. I believe such a situation is unacceptable, and I look forward to discussing the issue with you further.

Border Security

Finally, Mr. Secretary, I remain concerned about US-VISIT. While the Department requests \$340 million for the program for next year, I am not convinced that we truly know how much the system will eventually cost by the time it is deployed to all our airports, land borders, and sea ports. I also believe that the US-VISIT system will require, in part, a greater commitment to improving the condition of our border infrastructure. Next year’s budget includes \$92 million to construct and maintain Customs and Border Protection facilities

nationwide. However, more will be needed to ensure that our sea ports, air ports, and land border crossings have the infrastructure in place to provide for security while also maintaining the free flow of people and commerce.

Regarding border personnel, I note that more than two and a half years after September 11, the Department still does not have a comprehensive border staffing strategy. Congressional mandates to increase the number of personnel at our northern border have not been met, and we still do not know our personnel needs along our southern border. More work clearly needs to be done in this important area of homeland security.

Mr. Secretary, as I told Secretary Ridge earlier this year, we have made progress over the last year in protecting the homeland. The Department's programs have matured, and important efforts are underway. However, while we are safer, the key question remains – are we as safe as we need to be? I ask this question in the aftermath of the carnage in Madrid, and with the realization that al Qaeda still seeks to attack our homeland. I believe the answer is no. We must move faster, with stronger measures, to protect America.

I look forward to your testimony today.

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